



ISU student relies on teammates in cancer fight



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Casey Patton's volleyball teammates like the way she can set a ball, but admire more what a fighter she is off the court.

The 21-year-old captain of the Illinois State University Women's Club Volleyball team was gaining on her goal to become a nurse, when a brain tumor she has battled since high school slammed into her life again. She will leave school soon to get medical treatment in Boston.

But the tumor hasn't stopped her zest for living or her efforts on behalf of a charity she started for children battling similar cancers.

"She never pities herself, nor does she let the cancer get in the way. Rather, she has used this as the driving force to keep doing what she loves to do," said Allie Mark, president of the ISU Women's Club Volleyball, a competitive traveling team.

Dark period

Patton, originally of Woodbridge, was diagnosed with the tumor in August 2006, a few days after participating in the Chicago Triathlon. She could only attend high school one day a week for 18 months.

"It was the darkest period of fighting in my life," she said. "I needed a coping mechanism."

That mechanism became focusing on others, especially children with cancer. Patton, then a high school junior in suburban Downers Grove, started "Be the Cure," a charity devoted to pediatric brain cancer.

Since then, she has raised \$80,000, mostly through the sale of "Be the Cure" T-shirts.

She also sang, took part in radio-a-thons and had speaking engagements to raise money for the Falk Brain Tumor Center at Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago, where she was treated. The center receives the proceeds from Patton's charity.

"What 20-year-old has done that?" said Mark, an ISU senior.

Health issues arose again when she was an Illinois Wesleyan University music major on a vocal scholarship. Her immune system weakened from the chemotherapy and she had to leave school.

When she returned to school last year, this time at ISU, she switched her major to nursing. The career change was inspired by the care she received from her own nurses.

"Casey is one of the most amazing people I have ever met. She is so strong in dealing with her situation," said Dana Dettloff, a volleyball team member. "She ... loves to enjoy life all of the time no matter what is going with her health."

Treatment ahead

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